GSWS 321-4: Special Topics in GSWS: Culture and Embodiment: Disrupting Body Dualisms.

Professor: Dr. Beth Seaton
Email: eseaton@sfu.ca
Office: AQ 5095
Office hours: TBA
Lecture: Tuesdays 8:30 – 12:20; AQ 5047

Course Description:
This class examines the ways in which bodies act as the material for cultural and social structural relations, including cultural identities, societal norms, spaces, geographies, and affects. We will consider how bodies embody the signifying systems of gender, sex, sexuality, race and class, how they become the objects of ‘expert knowledge’ such as medicine, or act as vessels of information via technologies and systems of surveillance.

And yet, not all embodiment is beholden to social discipline. The felt sense of a body, its realness in relation to lived experience, can disrupt such determinations, especially those premised upon the dualisms of mind/body; male/female; culture/nature, etc. Embodiments can also be un-intelligible or incoherent, and their ‘senselessness’ can challenge normative social powers. But who can afford incoherent or unintelligible embodiments? And when is such incoherence strategic, or simply the necessary conduct of a life?

In examining the complex entanglements of embodiment as both product and process, we will draw from materialist, sociological, feminist, queer and phenomenological approaches that allow us to understand embodiment and its transgressions or contestations. Topics that will be discussed will include: marked bodies; eating bodies; abject bodies; laboring bodies; bodily affects; trans embodiments; machine embodiments; animal-human embodiments; the embodiments of violence; and the materialization of gender and sexuality in digital space.

Educational Goals:
In this class, students will learn to think critically about the means by which societal norms and cultural identities are made material – made real – within the human body. In this endeavor, students will learn important theoretical and methodological approaches to understanding society, social discipline and human embodiment, including semiotic analysis, post-structural and critical analyses of embodiment and materialist and phenomenological approaches.

Course Texts and Courseware:
Custom courseware and/or canvas.

Course Evaluation and Assignments:
Participation: 10%
3 short reviews of the class readings: 15%
Short Test on Key Words in Culture and Embodiment: 15%
Joint seminar presentation on culture and embodiment: 15%
Annotated bibliography in preparation for term paper: 15%
Term paper on culture and embodiment: 30%

Prerequisite: 15 units